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Locating processes of identification: Studying the precipitates of *re-memory* through artefacts in the British Asian home.

Divya Tolia-Kelly

Memory has been figured as an important process of *placing* and locating people and communities both geographically and socially. Memory has also been significant in research on people who not part of a formal record of history. This memory-work includes a focus on Black identity, especially in the work of Toni Morrison and Paul Gilroy. This paper seeks to examine the relevance of memory and *re-memory* for the social geographies of the South Asian population in Britain. In the first section I examine visual and material cultures as mechanisms for memory, especially their role in figuring diasporic positioning, and identity politics. These are form of memory as testimonies and biographical narratives. In the paper I have argued for the relevance and value of *re-memory* in understanding the narratives of British Asian heritage in the everyday domestic environment. *Re-memory* is an alternative social narrative to memory as it is a form of memory that is not an individual linear, biographical narrative. *Re-memory* is a conceptualisation of encounters with memories, stimulated through scents sounds and textures in the everyday. ‘Home possessions’ constitute precipitates of re-memories and narrated histories. These are souvenirs from the traversed landscapes of the journey, signifiers of ‘other’ narrations of the past not directly experienced but which incorporate narrations of other’s oral histories or social histories

that are part of the diasporic community's re-memories. Collectively, visual and material cultures are identified as precipitates of these re-memories in the form of historical artefacts of heritage and tradition.

Keywords Memory *re-memory* identity domestic cultures material cultures.

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Visual and Material Cultures as artefacts

The role, value and nature of memory is a major theme in many social science disciplines. So it is somewhat surprising, given memory's critical importance in defining a sense of self in a spatial and temporal frame, that it has been neglected in contemporary geographical writing. In this paper I examine the importance of researching visual and material cultures in the home, as mechanisms for remembering geographies of lived environments that contribute to British Asian social history. These active connections with memories through visual and material cultures constitute *processes of identification* for this group. Memories activated through these cultures in the home are considered as essential in discourses of heritage, which are significant for the South Asian diaspora. The prismatic qualities of material cultures ensure that these cultures become nodes of connection in a network of people, places, and narration of past stories, history and traditions. Solid

materials are charged with memories that activate common connections to pre-migratory landscapes and environments. These memories signify geographical nodes of connection which shape and shift contemporary social geographies in Britain, post-migration. This form of memory-history geographically locates the post-colonial within landscapes, mobilised in the process of migration. These landscapes are neither bounded nationalistic landscapes or, lived tangible everyday spaces; instead, these remembered locations situate the post-colonial migrant. This situation is a post-colonial space-time, unbounded by formal nation or national history, not usually mapped or recorded by the academy.

In this research I have mapped the postcolonial situation through the use of domestic cultures as artefactual records of connections to other remembered landscapes, natures and lived environments. This paper is a move away from considering memory-history (as has been previously done), within structures of elite and vernacular past landscapes (Wright 1985; Wright 1991). Here, I position the home as a site where an history linked with past landscapes is refracted through the material artefacts in the domestic sphere (Samuel 1994). This reflects a shift in the focus of British heritage work that disturbs partial and thin accounts of a national past, which have emerged more recently. However, questions of ‘whose heritage?’ and ‘whose histories?’ are continually significant in examining the relationship between memory and the materials of historical narration (Hall 2000). It is clear therefore that any British historical geography or British heritage programme of presenting a relevant inclusive heritage record should include an understanding of

memory-work that occurs in the vernacular landscapes of the British Asian home.

Home is the site of critical artefacts that impact on the ways that South Asians remember collectively, representing a body of artefacts relevant to British heritage. By linking the refraction of local, national and migrational memory-histories, embedded in the fabric of everyday life, it is possible to refocus on the significance of 'home' in the making of broader national discourses. The 'home' is the stage for emitting history (Samuel 1994). Material cultures are not simply situated as mementoes of a bounded past but are precipitates of syncretised textures of remembered ecologies and landscapes. These solid precipitates are where memories of past accounts accrue. Signification of identity, history and heritage, through these material cultures, depends upon the continuing dependence on the past for sustenance in the present. These material cultures secrete an essence of security and stability. Ironically these material foundations are sometimes transient, ephemeral things, which in turn fade, tear, fragment, dissolve and break. Individual objects relate to individual biographies, but are simultaneously significant in stories of identity on national scales of citizenship, and the intimate domestic scene left behind. The new site of home becomes the site of historical identification, and the materials of the domestic sphere are the points of signification of enfranchisement with landscapes of belonging, tradition, and self-identity.

Material cultures, through their installation are critical, in the formation of new political identities, carving out new landscapes of belonging. These new contexts for material artefacts refigure the narration of the past imbued within them. Memory is an important political tool, grounding both individual memory and collective cultural heritage stories. These processes are not exclusive to the South Asian population, in fact other writers have looked at different migrant communities and their valuing of domestic artefacts as stores of cultural narratives and memorialised biographical narratives (for example see Boym 1998 and Lambert 2001). The presence of these materials of heritage disturbs and shift notions of British-ness. By looking at the collage of material cultures in the British Asian home as layered with aspects of memory, I have examined them as historical inscriptions within the domestic landscape. Material cultures are critical in relation to the new sites of identity-territory relations; memory-history as I have posited it, is activated *in relation* to the new context of living. These domestic inscriptions record the post-colonial positioning that informs a politics of South Asianess within a multicultural landscape. Imbued within this political orientation is a geography of being, belonging and making home, linked directly with a post-colonial history. Within this analysis ‘multiple provenances’ emerge (Parkin 1999, 309), where the notion of ‘home’ and ‘origin’ are not fixed in one locus. Memory-history counters the unbounded notions of ‘Asian’ ethnicity (biological) and nationality (cultural) through a system of collective logic that is a collectively remembered and valued memory-history (Tolia-Kelly 2002). The specific contexts of ‘home’ and origin are set out in the next section, along with some

methodological contexts. This section introduces the substantive argument promoting the value of *re-memory* in the social geographies of British Asians.

The ‘diaspora’ makes ‘home’

My research has been with South Asian women in North-London. My argument demonstrates the valency of social memory as inscribed within the materials of culture as signifiers of ‘home’, ‘tradition’ and ‘history’; together forming a collage of ‘textures of identification’. In previous writing (Tolia-Kelly 2001; 2002) I have demonstrated the value of memory-work in situating their identities within geographies that are mobile; the experience of a past home resides with you as you traverse toward your next. Along this route other cultures are engaged with. For example, British Asians when engaged with visual cultures such as film, reconnect with social testimony and multisensory body-memories as part of the process of engaging with the text (Tolia-Kelly 2001). In this paper I will illustrate the process of *re-memory* as it contributes to post-colonial South Asian discourses of heritage, race and cultural identity. This is memory that is inscribed with a race-politics that is part of everyday social discourse (Brah 1999). As Leela Gandhi (1998) has notably expressed, there is difficulty in considering the post-colonial position as being truly *post*, as the struggles that these societies face are intrinsically linked to social, cultural, economic and political structures which are controlled and shaped by those *ex-colonial* powers.

Re- memory is memory that is encountered in the everyday, but is not always a recall or reflection of actual experience. It is separate to memories that are stored as site-specific signs linked to experienced events. *Re-memory* can be the memories of others as told to you by parents, friends, and absorbed through day-to-day living, that are about a sense of self beyond a linear narrative of events, encounters and biographical experiences. It is an inscription of time in place, which is touched, accessed, or mediated through sensory stimuli. A scent, sound or sight can metonymically transport you to a place where you have never been, but which is recalled through the inscription left in the imagination, lodged there by others' narratives. This form of social geographical co-ordinate is not always directly experienced but operates as a significant connective force. *Re-memory* is a resource for the sustenance of a sense of self that temporally connects to social heritage, genealogy, and acts as a resource for identification with place. The origin of the concept of *re-memory* is Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987).

"I was talking about time. It's so hard for me to believe in it. Some things go. Pass on. Some things just stay. I used to think it was my rememory. You know. Some things you forget. Other things you never do. But it's not. Places, places are still there. If a house burns down, it's gone. But the place – the picture of it – stays, and not in just my rememory, but out there in the world. . Someday you be walking down the road and you hear something or see something going on. So clear. And you think it's you thinking it up. A thought picture. But no. It's when you bump into a rememory that belongs to someone else. . The picture is still there and what's more, if you go there –

you never was there – if you go there and stand in the place where it was, it will happen again; it will be there for you, waiting for you” (Morrison 1987, 35-36)

Morrison proposes *re-memory* as a form of race-memory. Through bodily encounters in space, Morrison promotes the idea that you can bump into the oppressive experience of slavery and lost narratives. For Morrison her writing through of *re-memory* narratives makes the black experience and the collectively held record of slavery into text. The text makes material this intangible slave history. *Re-memory* inscribes the history of Black oppression within the public domain, as a resource for the centring of self through the past, for the black community. *Re-memory* mediates between now and the separation of slaves from their families, homes, and lives. Because re-memories are *socially* experienced they become material, and are shared amongst the African-American community. These are narratives beyond the traditional form of oral testimony, these operate in public space, and have for the individual encountering it, an intimate resonance with past narratives of others’ not known. Their effect is constitutive; the memories form the social memory of the community, effectively linking the group through a sense of collective history. *Re-memory*’s re-inscription in the environment is a political force, countering exclusionary heritage discourses, providing a form of synthesised embodied heritage. For those other diaspora’s who have experienced post-colonial labour migration there is also a sense of rupture with a heritage story of a community, not recorded formally. My aim is to trace the social memories which are critical to British Asians and their sense

of geographical identity and heritage. To do this I have chosen the site of home as the place where memories traverse, are stored, exchanged, encountered and materialised.

‘Home’ has many incarnations within social memory of the diaspora. Intertwined in the social memory of the group are imagined and lived landscapes of home, utopian senses of ‘home’ and where ‘home’ continues to be a source of identification. Home as feminists have argued, is not always a site of refuge; it continues to be a site of gendered oppression and violence. For black women, home is the landscape used strategically as a site for refuge from the alienating experience of racism and marginality. Within my research however, home is a conceptual tool to discover different means of engagement with lived landscapes; home harbour cultures of ‘making home’ and enfranchisement to new places and citizenships. Possessions operate as material nodes that symbolise, refract and resonate with the diasporic journey; they are connective markers to geographical nodes of identification. Through their prismatic nature ‘other’ lives, lands and homes are made part of this one. Material possessions operate as a buffer against exclusive national cultures by encompassing a collage of familiar textures. These ‘home possessions’ (Miller 2001) presence the social memories, they constitute precipitates of narrated histories, and artefacts of heritage and tradition. These are souvenirs from the traversed landscapes of the journey, as well as signifiers of ‘other’ narrations of the past not directly experienced; these narrations are termed re-memories (Morrison 1987; 1990). These are identified as precipitates of lived racial politics in the form of material

artefacts (Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton 1981; Mehta and Belk 1991).

Methodology

The research material derives from a three-stage research method where I interviewed two groups of Asian women from North West London over a period of ten weeks and met them for three group sessions, plus an individual tour of their homes. The two groups comprised of a working class group living in Harlesden in the London Borough of Brent, and a wealthier middle class group living in Buckinghamshire, Hertfordshire and Middlesex. Many women in this second group had migrated here from East Africa in the 1970s. I conducted group interviews (Burgess *et al* 1996) to gain insight into the social context to their values of living, and their senses of belonging and citizenship. In the first session I asked the women to map out their routes to Britain, essentially their biographies. In the second session I asked the group to bring in visual or material objects that were important in 'making home'. I also was invited to visit their homes to see these artefacts *in situ*; the women 'toured' the home and showed me the valued objects that made their sense of 'home' complete. In the third session we asked the group about their ideal landscapes of home, which contributed to a series of paintings by Melanie Carvalho (see Tolia-Kelly, 2002).

The research method involved a complex triangulation of group-interviews, home tour, and biographical mapping. The method was designed to reflect the complexity of the processes of identification that are in operation for this

post-colonial group. The methods employed establish the historical and geographical contexts to the women's lives in Britain, as well as establishing the role of memory in day-to day living (Tolia-Kelly 2001; 2002). By considering these cultures as situated within the construction of a settled British home, I sought to undermine monolithic notions of 'Asianess', and posit cultural practices as relational, dynamic and dialectically linked to a shifting international geography of migration and race-politics.

Enshrining heritage - Mandirs, Medinas and religious iconography

Firstly I focus on the sacred artefacts, in the form of shrines and religious iconology within the homes of the women interviewed. In all the women's homes, there was a significant religious space in the home. The *mandir* is the sacred home temple that each of the Hindu women has. The meanings of these shrines/artefacts operate as reminders of moral values, symbolise stories in the *Bhagavad-Gita*¹ and *Ramayana*², and a collection of religious icons which reflect different life values – wealth, prosperity, health, and righteousness. My interest was in the materiality of these objects in relation to the women's feelings of home, belonging and identity. It is quite clear from the tone and feeling with which the women describe the religious icons and objects, how much their lives are intertwined with the existence of the shrine itself and the variety of icons and other materials held within.

¹ This is the sacred Hindu text which is part of the *Mahabharata*.

² The *Ramayana* is the Sanskrit epic of *Rama*, an incarnation of Vishnu.

Hansa - “Previously in my old house I just had a cabinet which I made, I didn’t have a mandir or anything. Recently in the last 3-4 years, in Bombay I managed to get a little mandir, 4’ by 4’. It’s just a wooden mandir, really tiny. That’s because there problems of bringing it down here. I had made my mandir out of a small cabinet, furniture, not exactly a mandir shape or anything. We had this before. Murti’s are in there too. Slowly, slowly I’ve collected them. . .”

These Hindu ***mandirs*** individually, are dynamic sites whose content, size and aesthetics shift over time. They usually start as a small place in the house, a corner that will not be defiled during menstruation, and so they are often in cabinets, cupboards or whole rooms that can be locked away. The shrines hold religious relics such as *gangajaal* – water from the Ganges, *vibhuti* – the sacred dust from incense burning from pilgrim sites in India or from other temples, *chunis* – small pieces of embroidered cloth used on statues murtis from temples. These are blessed during *aartis* – special daily prayer. *Murtis* themselves have been purchased sometimes at sites of pilgrimage, the Asian cloth shops, grocers, or even sweet shops. Alongside these are *chromolithographs* (Pinney 1995) – vividly coloured, paper images of icons, gurus and saints; and other images which are made by combining the processes of photography and lithographics with layers of colour printed onto a photograph.

The presence of these shrines, significantly contribute to heritage-practices and a sense of *cultural nationalism*. The images in the shrines are

iconographic. These significations are locked into a connection with place, therefore they are iconographic both as a religious sign and a sign for a particular landscape. They represent an inter-ocular field (Appadurai and Beckenridge 1992). Essentially this means that the texts can be read simultaneously as singular texts, or as icons with multiple significations. The meaning of an individual religious image can operate as a sign for that religion, a sign for the story of an individual icon, a signification of India (through its visual grammar), or as a personalised metonymical symbol of the moment that it was received (from a parent, given by a priest), or a particular space that it is connected with (site of pilgrimage). Through having these characteristics, any individual image oscillates between encompassing religious, spatial, and historical iconography (Pinney 1997, p111). These signs are part of a collective, visual vocabulary for the South Asian community; social connections with a sense of communal identity are made through visual registers of colour, texture, sound and scent. The *gangajal* is a container (usually copper) holding water from the Ganges. On sight, in the shrine, it operates as a symbol of the sacred site of the Ganges and of its regenerative powers. It is also a symbol of nation, of India. The Ganges is the site of pilgrimage and therefore the *gangajal* acts as a souvenir of that place, and the moments of visiting, it may also be a metonym for others' narratives about the Ganges, for Hinduism and the regenerative power of Ganges water. The *gangajal* makes tangible these various narratives and tales, and consolidates various senses of place linked to the object; biographical and memorialised connections which are used to figure a life in the U.K., post-migration.

These artefacts are *possessions* and their presence echoes their power to situate and enfranchise through being present. Here, I privilege the value of possessions as linked to the diasporic sense of disconnection and loss, but recognise them as being critical in configuring and celebrating a new British identity by forming a body of cultural heritage. These cultures in the home are the remnants, the physical debris of the social imagination that is *re-memory*. The artefacts are considered precipitates of *re-memory*; they are the solidified tangible points of connection to the past narratives of migration, landscapes, and environments of belonging. They are inclusive of both historical and geographical memories of lived environments and their cultures of living previously considered as *history-memory* (Tolia-Kelly 2002). The *shrines* are significant in their value as points of engagement with being, living and developing a history in England.

The shrine is a valuable site, whose form fits the experience of migration. Shrines are dynamic; they allow growth of a collection of pieces that are sacred and blessed. These are not limited to religious sacred objects and icons. They are considered to be at the heart of family relations. Sometimes they are literally sites where the family genealogy can be traced. The shrines become places where, due to their sacredness, important family objects are placed. The shrines incorporate family photos of those who have passed away – grandfathers, great aunts, grandmothers, and great uncles. The shrine becomes collaged, continually superimposed with objects reflecting intimate moments and sacred life moments which are preserved and treasured; a

rosary given by a father, a piece of gold received on a wedding day, to sea-shells, or *shiv-ling* that were in the family home prior to marriage are all composed and united in the laying out of the shrine. This process of collage is an accrual of the sacred, emotionally valued by the family. Adding objects to the shrine is inscription. Sometimes families place letters at the shrine – job applications, offers, letters of achievement and even travel tickets, so that all these possible journeys can be blessed. Symbolic representations of the first breath of a baby, the first job, the wedding, and all the rites of passage and major life stages can sometimes be traced. By the *murtis* presence, the women believe preventative measures have been taken – preventing obstacles, mishaps and general misfortune. Intensely personal prayers are recited here- celebrating, requesting and proffering. These are a set of intense moments, and small things; miniature icons representing larger things, moments, and connections. Embroidered onto these textures of the object is a set of relationships between biographical and national and/or cultural identifications. The shrines accrue and secrete meanings connected to remembering experiences and narratives of others. Over time the shrine accumulates layers of meaning, it is believed to emanate protective vibrations; it is a spiritual place first before it is a purely religious site. Its significance grows with time along with its representativeness of family biography; the objects form a significant collage of embedded events, moments, and aesthetic imprints. These private, personal moments are inscribed physically. Their meanings shift in context, as the shrine is moved when the family move and thus traces migration at every scale. The mandir is the responsibility of the matriarch. Below Hansa describes her memory of

her mother and her mother-in-law, who have different religious beliefs and commitment and their lived landscapes.

Hansa - “In India it (public temple) was opposite our home, always wherever you go, it was so much on your way that you could quickly pray and leave. For my mum it was very important despite being partially sighted. She never used to go out too much. But she used to make her way up to the Derasa (Jain temple). . Its not in an open area, but residential area. It’s nice, Derasa is always nice, cool places. . India is very hot but these places are very cool. They hold and bring a sense of inner peace . . It (the mandir at home) brings me peace. It’s basically important for what I do and say . . I apologise for what I’ve done. . . Without it, I would still be able to focus, but my boys would not have seen it, and they would not be used to us seeing it. I can still close my eyes even if I don’t have a mandir, I can visualise. Because I have see day in and day out that Derasa there. But J and the boys they have not seen it.”

The mandirs refract collages of social and spiritual life. Their presence is also signification of cultural, social and moral discourses and practices. Therefore the shrines reflect back into the home many moments and spaces. They both absorb daily activity and secrete a historical context to these. As they trigger memories they operate on many scales of time, their reflectivity enhances the meaning of these shrines personally, culturally and they in turn produce new meanings and memories for the women, and their families. For Hansa’s family the shrine becomes a source of *re-memory* of Hansa’s

experiences of these religious landscapes of the past (in various life stages). The shrine makes tangible her stories and others' stories told through her narratives. Various places and moments are brought into the home through these material links. Her memories are made present through the matter of the shrine.

Figure 1 Lalita's mandir.

Figure 2 Hansa's mandir.

Figure 3 Shazia's mandir.

The relationship that Lalita describes below illustrates the interpolation of public and private religious practices into a critical cultural expression. These artefacts embedded within the social and cultural life of being in India, and form her sense of self through their presence.

Lalita – “ I think religion is part of my culture. Especially being brought up in Delhi, for me it was not two different things. I just couldn't say this is my culture. O.K. it's Kathak, and classical music, and touching elders feet, respecting them as my culture. And this is my religion. No, it was a fusion of both, it was blended together. So it was like . . .all festivals were not only religion, not only culture but fun also. So it was like a blend of everything. And we enjoy it. Like sometimes we were 40 of us going together. My father had eight brothers, and sisters, their spouses, their children, and cousins. Everybody going, booked like four coupes of the train, and rent a bus at Jamnu.”

Lalita describes the difficulty of defining her culture without religion. But the religious excursions she describes are social events. They have codes, rites and rituals of their own. Religion is not bounded within strict definitions of personal relationship with God, or limited to certain religious rituals. The religious learning is part of socialisation in the home. Each daily task has a religious moral code inscribed. For example 'eating' has rules and codes. Defining the moral order of family hierarchy were part of the function of religious excursions. However the religious text was not privileged over the social function of the trip. Religious texts and iconographies are woven through daily practices and rites. To some degree the shrines operate in the same sphere; their presence socialises family members into religious teachings and their influence on daily life. The shrine itself, or objects and icons within, are incorporated into the events of different life stages. The shrine activates a connection biographically and spiritually. The intensely personal spheres are shot through with religious moral codes and practices, which are also inscribed onto the shrine. This is done through adding objects, as well as inscribing contemporary meanings onto the materials within the shrine.

Shazia - "This is my mandir, it's the first room in the house. It's got our papers, the piano. . . . This room has always been a mixture, everything has got some meaning. You know like any important letters we have . . Everything has over the years been picked up. Like this is from my mums place. This one

I got from her mandir. . . the mandir has photos of Lalit's parents, and my parents."

The shrine's aesthetics and icons invite spiritual focus, they instil a sense of cultural education and integrity. Shazia believes that her family are lost without this reference point. Through gazing at the icons, they are required to situate themselves in relation to the heritage practices of grandparents, parents and her sense of kinship networks. For the diaspora a *positioning* (Hall 1990) is attainable through its presence. This is a complex positioning for the South Asian diaspora which can at different moments define itself in relation to both religious identity (Hinduism, Islam, Jain, Sikh or Christian) and as post-colonial Indian nationals. My focus here is on the shrines connective power to other landscapes rather than religious ideology. The shrine is symbolic of a cultural identity linked to a space pre-migration and its textures are central to this recalling process. The process of recall does not connect necessarily to lived and experienced memories or events, these collage with narratives of 'others'. The scent, touch, sight and sound of prayer, prayer bell, scent of camphor, incense, sandalwood, the feel of *vibhuti*, cloth, ghee and cotton wool, or the sight of icons, of vermillion are real textures, referencing religious rites and practice; they are all part of situating and socialising children centring them in relation to heritage stories and the social significance of these texts and textures in them. Importantly, the shrines enable and assert the practices of being Asian in relation to *otherness*. They (shrines) represent an iconography of cultural integrity, but their dynamism allow for greater relevance to everyday life.

The Hindu shrines trigger re-memories of sites of spiritual well being. Shilpa describes the intimacy she solicits through her shrine with the temples in Mumbai. This labyrinthine has alleyways leading off main streets which have wayside shrines which are points of congregation for Hindus. These shrines contribute to a landscape of righteous, moral living, which extend to Shilpa's feelings of belonging to a dynamic and connected community. In her description, the alleyways have shrines, which are open day and night; lit and visited. When recalled, they are points which offer meaning and light beyond the alienation experienced in the U.K.

Shilpa - "Everywhere (in India) is spiritual. In alleyways there are shrines. Your soul gains peace, you know? Here, (in England) travelling to the temple is very difficult In India you get to see people. Any place, you get to offer prayer. On the streets, roads you come across temples small and large."

This religious landscape extends throughout India and these shrines are duplicated in the home, as miniature versions. But of course, being situated in the home means that they exclude the social networking that public shrines allow. They allow connection only to the grander religious narratives of nation and Hinduism, but exclude the daily social and psychological enfranchisement that the existence of places of congregation offer. Public celebrations and festivals also take place in the everyday streets and roadways. They are not limited to single temples or focal points. The

crossroads of streets are where pedestrians join the celebrations; there is music, food and religious songs and prayer. For Shilpa it is not the event that is important but the fact that the streets and alleyways are all made part of the inclusionary landscape around. She does not feel alienated or distant. The religious activity ensures an intimacy, and a sense of belonging. This is translated also in the *look* of the streets and commercial districts. Religious icons are in all the shops and shrines, there is a smell of incense and camphor and an aesthetic, which she has tried to replicate in her own temple at home. The icons, the music and prayers through which she celebrates them are at the heart of her home-life.

Re-memory, and the race politics of culture.

The refraction of connection to past places, stories and genealogies through material cultures collectively signify the absence of other people, places, and environments. Within this paper I show how new configurations of identity, and post-migration living, are made possible through these absences.

Memory allows their absence to be made present through these precipitates of memory. The power of memory has been central to the theorisation of Black Atlantic identities by Paul Gilroy (1993). To date *re-memory* has been theorised by Morrison (1990) as a social force for whom the value of *re-memory* is as an embodied narration of the past that is on the scale of Black History. This configuration resonates with a sense of Black Nationalism, the connection across the diaspora being linked through a historical and biological *blackness*. This is re-memories value and its problem, in that those

that it calls to are essentialised or bounded through their bodies – their sensory tools which recognise the metonymical signs of recall. Those who can hear the sound of slave narratives are bounded through their bodily recognition of it, marked as recognising a black history, and in turn being defined through a biological identification. For South Asians there is no singular racialised experience, there is however a singular experience of marginalisation and colonial exploitation. The self-defined imagined community consolidates itself through this experience of migration and post-national grouping which preserves a double-identification as Black British and Indian/Sri Lankan/ Pakistani/ Kenyan and so on.

Re-memory is a significant expression of double-consciousness for racialised groups (DuBois 1903), experienced in the everyday, signified through expressive cultures (Gilroy 1993). For post-colonial people there exists a consciousness that is fractured, shifting between identification with a perceived utopian pre-colonial identity, and one that is shaped by an imposed colonial regime of race-definition, and the lived experience of being a post-colonial within Britain. It is within the arena of expressive cultures that double-consciousness has been made evident. Black artists, writers and musicians have engaged with the ‘doubleness’ of being within the heart of the West, but figured as ‘other’ within that nation’s history, and society (Araeen 1991; 1992; hooks 1994; 1995). The history and heritage of Black slavery and race oppression informs a consciousness – a historically located consciousness, referenced through contemporary expressive cultures, and which is expressive of the race-positioning of contemporary Black identities.

Morrison's *re-memory* is a haunting of the entire Black race by inhuman experience of slavery (Finney 1998) 'to pursue a future without remembering the past has its own deeper despair' (Horovitz 1998). The experience of the past informs the race-positioning of all post-colonial migrants in the present, and the process of the activated relationship depends on the needs of the *tellers* and the *listeners* (Sale 1998 :3). The call and response aspect of this racial positioning fulfils the function of informing and anchoring current identity processes with an historical memory-history that references *tradition, heritage, and history*.

Re-memory is a process engaged with the 'interior-life' of postcolonial groups who are in constantly negotiating between past landscapes and the present territories of citizenship. By 'interior-life' I refer to the internalised experience of rupture, alienation and non-identity, experienced in the period of post-migration. My concern in this paper is the relevance of the concept of *re-memory* to other post-colonial groups. *Re-memory* is imbued with the sentiments of loss, absence, but is critical in the politics of identification, which are so pertinent in contemporary global politics of migration, race, and heritage. The struggles of dealing with racism, fascism, and the social and economic landscape of a black race-identity are present within the pain motif of *re-memory*. This reflects the 'interior-life' of the experience of diasporic migration. For British Asians, there is a complex relationship with Britishness. Historically, their racialised positioning within Empire and beyond has figured them as outside British political identity: the Black English subjugated and marginalised by exclusive, and partial nationalist

politics (Gilroy 1987; Gilroy 1993). *Re-memory* being a site for the sustenance of the self, regenerates cultural and social collage of events; embodies a set of physical, emotional and geographical co-ordinates from which to forge a cultural heritage. This collage operates as a buffer to non-identity, racism and marginality from the appropriation of a national culture and the appropriation of national landscape (Agyeman 1990; 1991; Burgess 1996; Malik 1992; Matless 1997).

The cultural politics of re-memory

The intensity of *re-memory*'s power operates as a catalyst between Black communities past and present; its presence actively shaping the tones, and forms of cultural expression; through language, music, text and dance. The pain-motif in Gilroy's and Morrison's work is complex and yet singularly defined by the experience of enslavement; bodily, and spiritually subjugated to the slave owners designs and the colonial regimes of signification and value (Fanon 1959; 1961; 1967). Within this pain motif is the experience of rupture from family, land and biological and cultural identity. The significance of this pain motif to other post-colonial groups has yet to be fully researched, and it would be wrong to cite the pain-motif as equally manifest amongst all post-colonial peoples, including South Asians living in Britain. The regimes of truth and order were, significantly too varied and complex in East Africa and India to be discussed in this way. However the experience of rupture, loss, and vulnerability in social, cultural and biological terms has been a factor in diasporic identification. There are commonalities in their positioning today as post-colonial subjects, where the experience of

loss and rupture is translatable to the experience of British Asians. However the pain motif of enslavement is demonstrably unique and particular to the African population of enslaved men and women who appear anonymous in history but are significant in the formation of individual race-histories today. Within this paper, the pain-motif is a transitory feature of South Asian *re-memory*, however, traces exist within the text and the voices of the participants, alongside the creative, positive, and affirming qualities of remembering.

Within this analysis, I do not wish to conflate the South Asian and the Black diaspora (as Gilroy and Morrison write of it). This is not an attempt to transpose *re-memory* to another ethnic group, but a consideration of the power of *re-memory* in the South Asian ‘processes of identification’, which are also post-colonial, and diasporic. I wish to recover the links between the Asian experience of post-colonial positioning and the African-American one, through the political use of ‘Black-Britishness’. There are simultaneously specific and different formations of *blackness*, which commonly have their racism as a driving force of their constitution. ‘Asianess’ is not simply a parallel post-colonial diaspora to the Black African diaspora; it has different colonial histories and has resulted in various postcolonial geographies. The political definition of Black has expressed the ways that these solidarities have been theorised and played out. Britain Asian expressive cultures have been the site of political struggles and have made a critical contribution to identity discourse. As Kobena Mercer (Mercer 1990; 1990) writing about the 1970s and 80s, states, Asian expressive cultures have been critical in the

movement for race equality and justice. Other writers have expressed the central role played by Asian artists as part of a black political identification against racism and colonial 'regimes of truth' and cultural subjugation (Araeen 1987; 1989; 1991; 1992; Gupta 1993; Tawdros 1989; 1993).

In the 1970s voices such as Amrit Wilson (1978) and Pratibha Parmar were significant examples of political activists who were culturally Asian, and politically Black. This was a different positioning to the Black-activists in the US during the 1960s, because of political and social differences. Firstly, the struggles in the 1970s were dominated by collective action from Black and white activists. Politically the struggle against racism was considered a universal responsibility. In this practice therefore the Asian activists were not a distinctive group with separate interests. However since the decline of political climate of the early 1970s and 1980s this debate has been defined as redundant or obsolete by writers such as Tariq Modood (1990; 1994) who have favoured a culturally essentialist approach. In contrast to Gilroy and Morrison, Modood, privileges religious cultural identity, over (firstly), the shared experience of Asians of racial oppression, and (secondly) the employment of 'Black' as a political banner raised in opposition to divisive cultural politics. Modood diagnoses an oppression of Asians as mediated through politics of religion, as is evidenced in geopolitical rhetoric on a global scale. In contrast Gilroy's commentary is anti- (biological) essentialist, but he curiously concludes his thesis as a promoter of an 'anti-anti-essential race-history'. This is a public race-memory, available in the public sphere to those who can hear its' tone. Gilroy's race politics, counters

a class politics and embraces an understanding of cultural memory and heritage as located in the body – the sense of sound and an aural grammar only available to a black public. This conceptual *body-race-memory* has developed after Stuart Hall's term 'new ethnicities' which he developed as a means of countering an essential race politics of 'cultural nationalisms' that are not made cross-cultural in political practice.

Visual and material ecologies : 'Asianess' and its multiple provinces

In this next section I want to show how identification with 'Asianess' is not a bounded, territorial, or biological ethnic experience. My focus has been to consider Asianess as part of Britishness; directly linking cultural practice with the geographical roots of an Asian connectivity. This dynamic, historically informed and located Asianess is lost within research on the commodification of Asianess (Jackson 2002). My own attention to visual and material cultures therefore has been about grounding a cultural practice within the context of an historical frame. I intend to ground Asian heritage and history in the domestic sphere. Secondly it has allowed for an analysis of post-colonial identity, in light of geographical mobility. The 'home' has the dualistic qualities of being situated in the present and as a place created through a family history. The 'home' is a prismatic device where we can unravel a transnational Asian identity, located in Britain, as it is constructed in relation to other places, journeys and past environments and landscapes. My focus is the 'interior life'. My aim here is to unravel the intense memories that contribute to a sense of self in relation to a lived journey and lived landscapes of the past. Conceptually, *re-memory* posits Asianess as continually dynamic, and dialectically constructed in relation to a sense of

‘home’, ‘history’ and place of belonging. *Re-memory* for South Asia’s, is a means to record various locations of ‘Asianess’ and the social geographies of the South Asian diaspora without using a lens of biological essentialism.

Figure 4 – Migration routes of all the women in the study

In the research I wanted to contextualise the effects of the sacred artefacts with rather different cultures within the home. These refract a different set of visualised memories, but operate similarly within the regime of a social history of the South Asian group. Landscapes that are represented or refracted through craft and curios more crudely represent lived environments of the past which have become icons themselves. The touristic curios and craft objects that the women in the groups gather in the home, have varied biographies; their routes are not exactly the same as their owners, and are often part of the commodity culture. They are bought as ‘souvenirs’ or deliberately connecting devices *after* migration. They are situated as symbolic of other lives, narratives and national identifications. For the women from East Africa animal products and dark wood sculptures featured quite heavily in their homes and in their stories of East Africa; copper plates, ivory products and Masai Mara curios were all listed as valuable in their presence in the women’s homes in England. All of these things hold a *cultural vitality* (Gell 1986,114). They are not always deemed as objects with functions, but their meanings are infused with the biography or socio-cultural markers of the owner. These curios, when living within in East Africa were part of the commodity markets; defined differently to their definitions in a

British context. They are imbued with a sense of Africaness, but sold as tourist souvenirs in a mass market of similar tokens. The women in the groups make clear that these things (when living in East Africa), were considered kitch, or lacking in style. They are tacky remnants of a commodified ecosystem – elephant tusks, zebra skin, ivory necklaces, leopard skin handbags are all examples of the splicing of the African savannah into saleable touristic souvenirs. Within the British context these bear the prismatic qualities of the shrines, refracting memories of other lived landscapes.

Figure 5 Batul's African copper engraving

Figure 6 Shanta's African copper engraving

Figure 7 Shanta's African photograph

Bhanu - "Like flamingo feathers with some ornaments on their table."

Shazia - "Or those Mombassa gates in that copper, that is a must in most Kenyan houses"

Shanta - "Nobody used to keep it in their home. We didn't have anything even on the walls no. Nothing in the house, only after we left I think we are thinking of . . . My husband collects these David Shepherd pictures. These are mostly animal scenes, elephants and the African savannah feature largely in all of them."

Objects bought after leaving East Africa accrue meaning in their new context. In the process of being replaced, and replanted in the U.K. these

touristic curios are imbued with different values and meanings. What occurs is a re-construction of value (Geary 1986). Whilst living in East Africa, the objects are just background things; together they, form a collage, as part of the everyday, a backdrop to African life. The diasporic journey imbues them with a heightened significance. After the move they are created anew, in the process of their circulation. They may be bought as objects of little value but in the context of migration they are bought, given as gifts, or ordered at great expense to ensure their contribution to the cultural landscape of the home in England. Their intrinsic value is limited, but their symbolic value shifts through time; their contexts reconstructed. The activation of these signs and symbols occurs through the processes of remembering this 'other' landscape through them. Their earlier value is heightened in their being dislocated along with the owner, but in a social context of recognition and signification. Thus, an elephant tusk, or a zebra skin bag, is valuable not only to the owner personally, but has a role in signifying to others who see it in the home; a biographical and cultural vitality which inevitably resonates with others within the community and without. They resonate with biographies, and the narratives of others that inform a store of heritage values; the owners' memories are contained, refracted, and mediated through them. These curios become treasures; they are revered through their reconstruction and in turn reconstruct their contexts of display. Their existence changes a U.K. domestic space into one where Africa as a continent is inscribed as part of the valued and elevated experiences of the owners of the home. The home is contextualised through the place of Africa, and the objects are contextualised

through their presence in England. The value of the object in remembering Africa is simultaneously elevated reconstructed.

Darshna - “In your home do you have pieces that are always with you wherever you move?”

Bharti - “ Not religious, but some of them like the carvings of Kenya, . . I still have them. Those were the pieces that we always have in the home. .Masai figures, animal. . . the furniture I have carved, I bring from Kenya.”

Lalita – “In Mombassa, even if you go out, you know on the beach or go to the streets you see people selling them you know. On the streets, kiosks, full of these carvings, and I think that is a kind of trademark of Kenya. And I see them and it reminds you of Mombassa. . . Mombassa? The memory is beautiful. . . But then I come back home . . . That’s why I had to get very Asian furniture.”

There is a sense from some women that these *located* textures are essential, and that even if a variety of objects are collected to make home, the ‘Indian’ aesthetic has to dominate. Encounters with animals are recounted as epic experiences by the women. In recalling the landscapes, the elephants and animals are amplified in their, size, colour and are super-dynamic in the way in which they are recalled. Their size, strength and speed are vivid and made vital through the objects. This is not surprising considering the iconography of Kenya and the African Rift Valley in general; for residents the African National Parks were accessible and immediate. Set off against the ecology of the U.K. these memories and experiences become heightened and magnified.

They are imbued with sentiment, pleasure and pride until the objects that are refracting these moments are themselves elevated. The object and its own aesthetics are valued beyond their material worth and function. These objects acquire value, through a form of devotion, of reverence of the memories they signify. Through time these materials shift in meaning, ecologies become concentrated in iconic form, distorted, extended, enhanced through new contexts, and different moments.

The possession of goods, materials and objects often consolidates the enfranchisement to those landscapes of heritage that are refracted through the objects themselves. The owning, the *belonging to* enhances the memories that the object bears. The relationship with materials is sometimes figured through a sense of loss of land, or a way of life, distortion occurs through displacement. The sentiment of *loss* signifies the temporal as well as spatial distance from these meaningful landscapes. Through memorialisation these figure as mediators between times of lived experience and a sense of East African heritage that contributes to British Asianess. The textures of these curios are as significant as the images in them. Handcrafted Mvuli wood furniture, coasters of animals in the National Park, Copper etchings of elephants and ivory bracelets, make the sensory memories conflate with the experience of being in England. They also evidence the necessity of connecting back to these landscapes, which secure a common social history.

For many of the women the connection made through material cultures is described as internal, as *biological*; a connection through gut, blood, and

consciousness. This essential link is about being drawn to these textures of identification to a sense of community, home and heritage sited in East Africa. Possessing the curios are a way of possessing, retaining access, and enfranchisement to this past, both lived and remembered as a landscape of heritage. The act of appropriation gives back life to the object, in this new “reconstruction of value” (Geary 1986) it activates connections with this past heritage not only through being a relic to a lost landscape, but also as a gateway to memories of other lives and societies.

Conclusions

Memory theorised by Gilroy’s (1993) antiphonal memory, is a system of call and response, unavailable to a universal ear. This memory is situated as a counter-history to modernity and figures black diasporic identity in relation to all other discourses of history, tradition and political identity. This thesis has opened up the ground for delving into an expressed double-consciousness figured through a diasporic social history. To unravel the dialectics of the post-colonial lived experience as connected to history-heritage narratives, is a complex project. As I have argued in this paper lived environments harbour the precipitates of *re-memory* as they figure as narratives of social heritage. These solid precipitates, in the form of visual and material cultures, help situate diasporic groups politically and socially within ‘structures of feeling’ that have evolved through their varied relationships with national identity. A sense of nation, belonging and citizenship are figured through these active materials in the home

environment. Other textures of landscapes, narratives and social histories resonate through their presence. Geographical positioning is made possible through the coordinates of location they represent; the past landscapes in their present home allow for a practice of situating identity through them. These identifications have infinite configurations but continue to have a connective cultural significance amongst the South Asian diaspora living in the UK. *Re-memory* adds to these geographical coordinates, by incorporating social history, not directly experienced, but which form part of the cultural identity narratives which are live within the diaspora. A true understanding of the post-national, post-colonial experience is enabled through an interrogation of 'home' landscapes, and their material cultures. These are a critical contribution to understanding social geographies of migrant communities, which shape and reshape the social, cultural and political landscape in Britain.

Diaspora although a contested term within writing about race-identity and post-colonial politics (Nash 2002) remains as a valuable conceptualisation of an imagined community where non-territorial connections are sustained through the communities' sense of joined past cultural nationalism or rupture from a sense of bounded connection. For British Asians however, there is not always rupture from a singular national culture or territory. Instead, colonialism in the continent of Asia existed in many different nations, and disrupted national cultures economies and social strata in different ways. It also mobilised South Asians across the continents to labour in new territories of economic expansion. Colonialism was manifestly able to use cultural

differences, racial tensions, and inter-regional struggles in such ways as to render this region as a set of hybrid territories of Empire. These are reflected in the research presented here. The South Asian diasporas sense of boundedness is disrupted through processes of uncovering discontinuities in these differences in the roots and routes of the community, as well the experience of an unsustainable biological and cultural integrity. For East African Asians they are neither African, nor Indian. They are also culturally marginal to Englishness. Therefore for them, any formulation of a 'national' or 'traditional' national culture is dependent on the domestic scale, creative space where diverse configurations of 'Asianess' can be found. These contribute to the textural richness of an inclusive British heritage story, and a non-essential understanding of 'Asianess'.

The domestic sphere is an active site for the cultural identification and political positioning of British Asians. This positioning is always in context of a sense of rupture, not necessarily in relation to a utopian homeland, a biological purity or a notion of a singular point of origin. Instead the diaspora is connected and sustained through a shared social memory of the experience of 'lost' cultural landscapes and practices, including those shaped by religious philosophy. The term *diaspora* disrupts the fundamental logic of territory to determine identity (Gilroy 1987, 328), it allows for new configurations and relationships with territories and cultural shifts, but with social memory as a connecting body of historical narrative. The diasporic materials of culture are the precipitates of their collective social memory; together forming a collage of connective landscapes, cultural iconologies and

symbols of the communal experience of displacement from a sense of belonging and 'home'. These materials represent the physical buffer between their experience of displacement and the difficulty in dealing with marginalisation from new points of settlement. These cultures operate as a psychic investment in a set of 'textures of identification', they reflect this transnational communities shared 'structures of feeling', which have various formations and flows dependent on the routes and roots of migration and point of settlement.

Some researchers have framed this theoretically as transnationalism, (Vertovec 1999) drawing on a 'triadic relationship' (Safran 1991) of fluid movement of ideas and cultural values across national boundaries. *Re-memory* bridges notions of transnationalism, with the effects on individual and collective consciousness that informs new identities, and new processes of identification. These flows across continents inscribe re-memories that allow for the post-colonial memories of migration to be figured through processes of identifying with a social heritage and sense of enfranchisement to various lands and collective memories of the journey. Precipitates of *re-memory* allow us to view, imagine and connect with this dynamic post-colonial consciousness, dialectically formed through memories of these other worlds and pasts, as they are figured within Britain.

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Figure 1 Lalita's mandir.

Figure 2 Hansa's mandir.

Figure 3 Shazia's mandir.

Figure 4 – Migration routes of all the women in the study

Figure 5 Batul's African copper engraving

Figure 6 Shanta's African copper engraving

Figure 7 Shanta's African photograph